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■ *Zonolite insulation*

**Beware of unleashing asbestos dangers**

Environmental Protection Agency officials are worried about what the rest of the nation might do about Zonolite insulation (Missoulian, Jan. 11). Local health offices throughout the nation can probably rely on what health offices do best – epidemiological studies will unveil clusters of asbestos-related illnesses and ensuing detective work will find the source. A greater worry should be whether the decision to remove the Zonolite insulation from Libby homes was the right one.

Paul Peronard states that such products are not harmful if handled properly and that the agency's policy is to "leave it in place and not disturb it." The history of management of asbestos in the environment bears this out.

Asbestos was used in brake linings and in many products to act as a fire retardant, including a covering of boilers for heating systems. After workers in these industries suffered from asbestos-related illnesses, legislation was passed that stopped these uses. A war on asbestos-covered boilers was declared. Soldiers who looked like moon walkers, to protect them from airborne asbestos fibers, zealously descended on them. Concern for the health of the school occupants caused by all the ruckus they stirred up caused this program to be replaced by one that found a way to cover the asbestos and let a sleeping dog lie, so to speak.

If the desire to remove the insulation from Libby homes was based on data of concentration of asbestos fibers in the air of Libby homes, then we have to ask how specimens were collected. Did the asbestos come from shoes, or did the sampling literally suck insulation out of the walls and ceilings (Arousing the sleeping dog)? Perhaps there could be legislation that would mobilize the moon walkers when the insulation has to be disturbed and would tell an electrician how to protect himself when he drills into these walls.

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